

5. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY PROGRESS REPORT 2013

REPORT OF: LYNNE STANDING- HEAD OF HOUSING, ENVIRONMENTAL
HEALTH AND BUILDING CONTROL
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Wards Affected: All
Key Decision: No
Report to: Scrutiny Committee for Leisure and Community
5th February 2014

Purpose of Report

1. This report provides Members with an update on progress in 2013 against the Council's Single Equalities and Diversity Scheme 2013-16.

Recommendations

2. **The Scrutiny Committee is requested to recommend that the Cabinet member for Health and Community approve the Equalities and Diversity Progress Report 2013 included at Appendix 1.**
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Background

3. The Equality Act 2010 placed a duty on Councils to publish an annual report setting out progress to their Equality and Diversity Scheme. A new scheme for 2013-16 was approved by Council in March last year and it was agreed that annual reports on progress should be provided to this Committee.
4. The Council's recent equalities work has been shaped by the Equality Act 2010, which introduced a number of responsibilities for councils, including a new public sector equality duty and a requirement to promote equality of opportunity between those with "protected characteristics" and others. The public sector equality duty came into force in April 2011 and means that the Council must in the exercise of its functions have due regard to:
 - eliminating unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act
 - advancing equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not
 - fostering good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The nine protected characteristics are:

- age
- sex
- race
- disability
- religion or belief
- pregnancy and maternity
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership
- gender reassignment

The Act also introduced specific duties for public bodies to publish Equality Objectives and Equality Data to show their compliance with the duty.

5. The Government under its Red Tape Challenge has undertaken an assessment of how public bodies are meeting their public sector equalities duty, without adding unnecessary processes and bureaucracy. They concluded that it was too early to judge whether any legislative changes are required in respect of the duty and that a full evaluation should be undertaken in 2016 when the duty will have been in place for 5 years. The review commented that public bodies need to adopt a proportionate approach to meeting the equality duty and clearer guidance is required from the Equality and Human Rights Commission on the minimum requirements for compliance.
6. The Council has always sought to take a proportionate approach to its equalities work and tried to mainstream it with its customer service activities, recognising that meeting the needs of individual customers for Council services is consistent with good equalities practice.

Progress Report

7. The Annual Report for 2013 is included at Appendix 1 and sets out:
 - The legislative background provided by the Equality Act and the national Red Tape Challenge review of how the Public Sector Equality Duty is working.
 - Progress to the Council's Equality Objectives, in the context of the actions for their achievement contained in the Equality and Diversity Scheme. Particular areas of progress include:
 - improving our communications through use of social media and reviewing our website to ensure our information reaches as wide a spectrum of the community as possible.
 - improving the accessibility of the Oaklands reception, including a new disabled access public toilet and baby change facility, induction loop and more accessible seating area.
 - continuing to support voluntary organisations through our grants scheme.
 - improving our procedures for dealing with Hate Crime and Anti-Social Behaviour.
 - implementing our programme of Equality Impact Assessments.
 - updating our Equality Data in respect of our services and staff.
 - Key areas of progress in providing for the needs of the protected groups in the District, and in addressing issues arising from where people live and their income or skill level. There are lots of examples of good work that has been done over the past year to improve the lives of some of the most disadvantaged members of our community.
 - Conclusions regarding the Council's equalities and diversity work in 2013 and initiatives to be developed in the year ahead.
8. Overall, good progress is being made in meeting our duties. Members are asked to consider the Annual Report and advise whether there are any areas of the Council's Equality and Diversity activity that require further emphasis.

Policy Context

9. The Annual Report demonstrates progress against the Council's Equality Objectives. The delivery of these objectives will make a major contribution to the priorities set out in the Sustainable Communities Strategy and Corporate Plan, and to the Council's aim to achieve Opportunity and Quality of Life for All.

Other Options Considered

10. The report updates on progress to the Equalities and Diversity Scheme, which is designed to set out a programme to meet the Council's statutory requirements under the Equality Act. No other practicable options were identified.

Financial Implications

11. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Risk Management Implications

12. The Progress Report helps the Council to continue to demonstrate that it is meeting its public sector equalities duty under the Equality Act and to avoid the risks associated with non-compliance.

Equality and Customer Service Implications

13. Customer service and ensuring equality of access are of continuing importance, especially with regard to meeting the needs of those who are vulnerable or may find it difficult to access our services. The report sets out steps to meet the needs of vulnerable groups and refers to the Council's programme of impact assessments, which are designed to promote equality and to identify and address the barriers that may prevent people accessing its services.

Other Material Implications

None.

Background Papers

None.